

Status Report

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

FEBRUARY 1999



Council Activity Update



Getting to know you: Premier Klein meets new Council Members during their first Council Meeting, held at the Legislature on November 13, 1998.

New Council Takes Reigns

The 14 new Members of the Premier's Council, introduced to *Status Report* readers in our last issue, have firmly grasped the reigns of control. The new Members, who represent a broad cross-section of disability interests in Alberta, first met on November 13 and twice again in January.

In concert with the Council's secretariat and a private Alberta consulting firm, Council Members are in the process of developing a comprehensive business plan to guide the Council's activities during its extended five-year mandate.

"We view the business planning process as an opportunity to position ourselves to best serve the disability community," explains Council Chair Rob Lougheed, MLA for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. "It will help confirm our Mission and Vision, and lead to the identification of disability-related priorities that require attention in the context of Alberta society as we move forward. And it will help us gain a picture of the outcome needed for each priority."

Watch for updates in future issues of *Status Report*. ♦

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Movies for the Blind

James Cameron, the Oscar-winning director of the blockbuster hit *Titanic*, is leading a crusade to format movies so that they may be enjoyed by people who are blind.

In November, Cameron personally debuted a special version of *Titanic* at a theatre in Houston. In attendance were some 200 blind patrons. Normally, Kate Winslet's pouts and Leonardo DiCaprio's sly grins would have been lost on these moviegoers. But this version of *Titanic* featured an "editorial" narration, which was recorded by Cameron and a number of others, including actress Angie Dickinson. The narration allowed those in attendance to hear descriptions of the action and even actors' facial expressions.

"My feeling is, movies are for everybody," said Cameron.

The special screening was part of a fundraising event for the TheatreVision project, dedicated to providing access to movies for people who are blind. A dinner after the screening, attended by former President George Bush and a host of celebrities, raised some \$200,000 for the project.

TheatreVision has existed for more than five years. It hasn't yet resulted in substantially more movies for people who are visually impaired, but Cameron's efforts may breathe new life into the project. ♦



The AISH Review



► Elaine Chapelle

The review of the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Assured Support programs that began in January has been plagued with controversy.

The intent of the review, according to Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Family and Social Services, was to "ensure they meet the needs of Albertans" and "to make sure they focus on ability rather than disability." Feedback from the affected community reveals deep mistrust of government's intentions.

The Premier's Council was formed in 1988 to provide advice to government on policy issues such as this. Almost since inception, this Council has been on record as insisting that the AISH program be reviewed. It has therefore been necessary for the Council to develop a firm policy position on the proposed changes. The following position was developed by Council Members during two-day meeting late in January, and it was subsequently forwarded to the Minister, Premier Klein and others.

The Council forwards the following position regarding...proposed changes to the AISH program, and the response by Albertans with disabilities and their families / advocates to proposed changes.

With regards to recent claims and opinions questioning the honesty and integrity of persons with disabilities in receipt of AISH, the Council believes in and supports the integrity of persons with disabilities and their honesty in attempts to fully participate in the life of the province. Issues and concerns related to individual situations/scenarios must be addressed on a case by case basis. Furthermore, the Council:

- *believes that AISH must be an Individualized Income Replacement Program based on disability;*
- *believes that income support must be viewed as a right and an investment (not a privilege) necessary for some Albertans with disabilities;*
- *supports extended medical benefits and rapid reinstatement in order to reduce*

barriers that discourage AISH recipients from working;

- *advises that the entire assessment process for employability needs to be reviewed;*
- *believes that further clarification is required from AFSS with regards to 1) assessment of ability and 2) identification and implementation of training opportunities (i.e., the statement "connect people to appropriate work or training, based on their abilities" is ambiguous);*
- *believes that further clarification is required from AFSS with regards to its position that benefits should be "more responsive to family size" in order to more clearly spell out the implications on the individual with a disability;*
- *supports the provision of additional benefits becoming available to AISH recipients to meet extra needs;*
- *supports the review of the AISH program; however, considering assets in determining eligibility may severely compromise the original intent of AISH as an income replacement program; and*
- *notes the existence of other support programs in the province that do not require asset testing.*

With respect to the issues and concerns pertaining to the AISH program, the Council will continue to listen to collective, informed responses from the community and articulate its position to government. ♦



Meet your new Premier's Council Back row, left to right: George Schmidt, Lionel Remillard, Judy Hellevang, Patricia Pardo, Premier Ralph Klein, Anne Belohorec, Sandra Newhouse, Andrea Fugeman-Millar, Gordon Bullivant and Gerald Gordey. Front row, left to right: Carrielynn Lamouche, Rob Loughheed (Chair), Jim Killick, Margaret MacCabe, Ruth Peterson, Shirley Dupmeier (with Willie). ♦

Status Report

Editor: Cliff Bridges

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Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
250, 11044-82 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 0T2
Phone (780) 422-1095 or
Toll Free 1-800-272-8841 (Voice or TTY)
Fax (403) 422-9691
E-mail: pcspd@planet.eon.net

Readers' feedback is always appreciated. Please address your correspondence to: The Editor, **Status Report**, at the above address.

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Biotechnology & Disability

A Guest Editorial by Dick Sobsey, Ph.D., University of Alberta

As we rapidly approach the year 2000, advances in biotechnology have frequently been the topic of front-page news. According to Walter Isaacson, writing in the January 11, 1999 issue of *Time*, "It's time to ring in the century of biotechnology." Isaacson believes the 21st century will be dominated by new developments in biotechnology just as the 20th century was dominated by physics. He considers it to be self-evident that the discovery of the electron in 1897 was the driving force behind the events of the last 100 years, and considers it to be equally evident that the discovery of DNA in 1953 will control the events of the next century. He assures us that Aldous Huxley "got it wrong" when he described the *Brave New World* in which biotechnology became the tool that centralized power in the hands of a few. Instead, he tells us that it will be a key to empowerment of individuals and families.

If Huxley was predicting the effects of the discovery of DNA on society, perhaps we should be forgiving of his lack of accuracy since he wrote the book more than 20 years before that discovery was made. There

are, however, more important problems with Isaacson's prediction. First, while attractive to some, the notion of a single dominant discovery or discipline in any century is absurd. For example, the 20th century has been shaped at least as much by developments in transportation, communication, manufacturing, and medicine as by the discovery of the electron.

Second, our ability to predict the social effects of discovery and invention has historically been consistently dismal, and there is little reason to think it will be any more accurate than in the past. For example, when automobiles began to become available, no one predicted that they would lead to people gaining weight, the creation of suburban living, the development of shopping malls, thousands of accidental deaths, or a vastly more mobile society. Instead, the chief advantages were thought to be that they were safer and cleaner than horses.

Third, while any technology may lead to changes, not all changes are for the better and some that seemed promising at the time were disasters in retrospect. For example, while developments in physics have pro-

duced wonders in the 20th century, the safe, clean and inexpensive source of inexhaustible energy we were told about turned into Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, and dozens of other nuclear plants that now sit idle because they are too dangerous and too expensive to operate. The 1940s attempt at preventing SIDS by exposing children's thymus glands to x-rays and the 1950s introduction of fluoroscope machines into shoe stores so that people could see how their shoes fit were two other breakthroughs

"As complex procedures allow great benefits to a few at great expense, they use resources that might provide simpler benefits to many others at much less expense."

that became a little less popular with time. Biotechnology will produce its own share of equivalent disasters.

Finally, and most importantly, discoveries do not inevitably compel society to do anything—they simply allow societies to construct the futures that they choose. As a society, we have choices about if, when, and how biotechnology is utilized.

What are the choices that biotechnology will present to us and what are some of the implications of these choices for people with disabilities? We are presented with many tempting promises about wonder drugs individually created to the patient's unique genetic profile, healing of long-severed spinal columns, and restoration of a wide variety of abilities. According to Isaacson, society should "permit using genetic engineering to cure diseases and disabilities but not to change personal attributes." It sounds great, but there some major challenges.

Some of these involve reconceptualizing our basic ideas. For example, the word "cure" originally implied restoring an individual to health. We cured people, not "diseases and disabilities". Increasingly, the notion of cure as the elimination of disease has taken over. In this new sense, a *cure* can take place simply by eliminating a person or

Who's that on the telephone?

Ever wonder who you're talking to when you call the Premier's Council office? Meet Carmen Grandmont and Cheryl Koss—the two members of our team that "pretty much run the office," according to Executive Director Elaine Chapelle.

Carmen (top right) joined us as our Senior Administrative Support last September. She takes care of the Council's accounting and budgeting needs, and provides all senior administration support to the Council and Secretariat. She's also Cheryl's backup for reception and information provision.

Cheryl (bottom right) also joined us last September. As our Receptionist and Information Coordinator, she covers reception, provides information and advice to callers/visitors, manages mail and our resource library, and manages to do a host of other jobs.

Now you can put a face to that voice on the phone.



ensuring that he or she will never be born. It is not a coincidence that advocates for assisted suicide and euthanasia repeatedly suggest that, because improved technology makes the extension of life possible, we must deliberately end lives that lack adequate quality. These "quality of life decisions" are rarely left solely in the hands of the people whose lives are terminated.

Advances in biotechnology will push society to make more of these decisions, not only because they will lead to the possibility of greater extensions of life, but also because they are extremely expensive. As complex procedures allow great benefits to a few at great expense, they use resources that might provide simpler benefits to many others at much less expense. For example, in the not distant future, complicated and complex biotechnology may produce great benefits to a few individuals in the early stages of MS while hundreds of others are denied adequate attendant care because of limited resources. Society will have to decide what constitutes a reasonable balance of resource allocation. I, for one, do not believe the answer is trying to slow down progress or resist technology. However, before society buys into the benefits, it needs to understand the human and financial costs.

People with disabilities in Alberta will be deeply affected by how these decisions are made, and they also should become deeply involved in making these decisions. If not, large companies with huge investments in biotech industries will be happy to take control of the decisions. If this happens, a greater and greater proportion of health and social spending will go to high-tech services while low-tech care deteriorates. At the same time, a greater and greater concentration of wealth will go to high-tech industries while those formerly engaged in low-tech care go unemployed.

Isaacson and other prognosticators of the future want us to believe that there are no choices to be made and that our fate was sealed in 1953 when DNA was discovered. If we accept it as inevitable, it will be. If we see biotechnology for what it really is, an expensive, potentially useful and potentially dangerous tool, we may choose to use it with caution. ♦

Dick Sobsey is the Director of the U of A's JP Das Developmental Disabilities Centre.



Employment

CNIB's Working Solutions

What do blind and visually impaired people do for a living? Is it possible for a person losing vision to remain productive? What makes the difference for people with little or no vision when they attempt to find work?

In 1996, CNIB's Alberta/N.W.T. Division conducted a survey of its working age clients to find answers to these questions. "The results were definitely a good news/bad news scenario," says Bill McKeown, Executive Director, explaining that unemployment for blind and visually impaired people is about 71 percent in Alberta.

"The good news, however, is that blind and visually impaired people are finding work in a much broader range of occupations than we expected."

McKeown points out that today's CNIB clients include system analysts, judges and lawyers, psychologists and social workers, and restaurant and clerical workers.

The survey also provided a clear picture of the factors that allow these blind and visually impaired people to compete so effectively in the workforce. One factor is the use of ever-improving technological solutions, such as computers with speech and large-print magnification ability. Another factor is education—higher levels translate into more opportunity. And, perhaps most important, there is attitude—not only of the employee, but of the employer.

"Employer attitudes are crucial," says McKeown. "I can't tell you how many of

our clients have doors shut on them before they have a chance to demonstrate how they'll do the job."

That's why CNIB is launching an awareness campaign aimed at Alberta's business sector. "We want employers to know that blind and visually impaired people are using technology and their own creativity to be productive—and that it doesn't have to cost much to adapt a workstation for a visually impaired person," says Bert Moen, a career counsellor at CNIB's Edmonton office. "We also want to reach people on the job who may be losing their vision, to let them know how we can help them stay productive."

Moen explains that many people don't know the CNIB's services are available to people who are not completely blind, or even severely visually impaired. "People losing their vision often try to hide it as long as they can—and that can mean tremendous personal strain, as well as mistakes at work."

The CNIB provides advice, counselling and technical information on coping with vision loss to clients, their families, and employers. After a workplace assessment, employment counsellors can often provide advice that can help a valued staff person stay productive, or allow a new employee to come aboard. In many cases, government subsidies are available to help make any necessary adaptations.

You can call CNIB in Edmonton at 488-4871 (toll-free 800/365-2642) or in Calgary at 266-8831 (toll-free 800/376-2642). ♦

CNIB Wins Prestigious International Award

Last August, at a ceremony in New York City, CNIB was announced as winner of the SAP/Stevie Wonder Vision Award in the category of Role Model Organization of the Year. The award was accompanied by a gift of \$226,500. CNIB was chosen from among 69 entries originating from 12 countries.

CNIB was founded in 1918. Today, through 60 district offices across Canada, the agency offers a range of rehabilitation, information and special technological services and programs to more than 90,000 clients.

The Vision Awards were created by SAP America Inc., an international software corporation, and entertainer Stevie Wonder. They are intended to raise awareness and spur the development and distribution of technology solutions to enable blind and visually impaired persons to actively participate in the business community. ♦



CNIB clients are employed in a wide variety of jobs. Their success is proof positive that, given the right employer attitudes and appropriate technological support, blind and visually impaired Albertans are up to the task.

Ivan Prpic is a Certified Management Accountant employed as a Complex Case Officer, Collections, with Revenue Canada in Edmonton.

"You have to be persistent," says Prpic, who is totally blind. "In my job search, I found that a lot of potential employers I approached responded with the idea, 'Get serious—I can hire somebody with sight.'"

Persistence paid off six years ago, when he was hired by Revenue Canada. Since then, he has proven himself time and again in his work, which involves investigation and collection of debts. Currently, he is Acting Team Leader of 15 collections officers, and he is often involved in training of new staff and other advisory roles.

Prpic uses optical character reading technology and text-to-speech software to help him carry out his work. "It is realistic for a blind person to do this kind of job," he says. "It just takes the right skills, a little technology, and co-workers who will let you prove yourself."

Jane Noonan, who lost her central vision in both eyes in 1995, says that getting over her own resistance to accepting help made a huge difference in her life and career. "For me, it was hard to go to the CNIB," says Noonan, who took a year and a half off after losing her vision. "But they are very supportive, and you'll find that there's a lot of people out there struggling with the same thing."

Noonan says the turning point for her occurred when an employment agency "wrote her off." She then applied directly for a job with an Edmonton trust company. She scored well in the interview, and landed the job. Since then, she has moved into her current position as Trust and Investment Services Administrator for The Trust Company of Bank of Montreal in Edmonton.

Technology plays a big role in her work—in addition to using magnifying glasses, she has had her employer's programs and equipment adapted to her vision (a 21" monitor sits on her desk).

"I'd like to tell employers not to pre-judge someone with a disability," she says. "They know they'll have to prove themselves three or four times as much as anyone else—so if they made it to the interview, you know they really want the job, and they'll work their tail off for you."

Les Quan's career as a systems analyst began almost 30 years ago. "My advisors at social assistance told me to stay on (welfare) and assured me I'd be well taken care of," says Quan, a Calgarian who has severe myopia. "I said, 'You'll make a better investment if you educate me and get me off your books.'"

After completing a CNIB class in computer programming, Quan worked his way through considerable further training in the computer field. He uses a range of hand-held magnifiers, a 21" monitor, and a large-text program with speech capability.

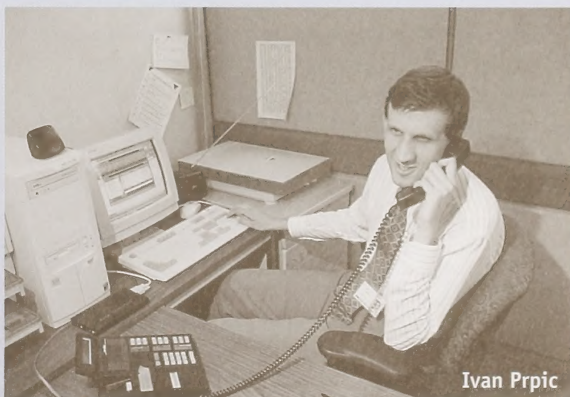
After 25 years with NOVA Gas Transmission, Quan's department was recently outsourced to another company, ISM. But with the adaptivity learned through years of deteriorating vision, he has made the transition. "People with disabilities are overcomers by nature," he says. "This is one of the values we bring to the workplace." ♦



Jane Noonan



Les Quan



Ivan Prpic



Targeting Discrimination

A Government of Alberta program is putting anti-discrimination ideas into action.

Does your organization have a great idea for a project to fight discrimination against people with disabilities or any other minority group? If Alberta Community Development thinks your idea has merit, they may decide to fund it.

The department oversees a little known initiative called the Community Initiatives Financial Assistance Program. In turn, this program administers a Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund. This fund offers grants to organizations involved in projects that reduce discrimination and racism or affect changes in programs, services or organizations that prevent full and equitable participation. Total funding available per year is \$750,000.

Virtually any organization can apply for funding under the program: community organizations, non-profit organizations, public institutions, municipalities, educational institutions, ethno-cultural groups, and religious organizations.

Organizations apply for grants by completing an application form and sending it,

with all required documentation and attachments, to the Human Rights and Citizen-

"...organizations that take a non-confrontational, hands-on approach in fighting discrimination are given preference..."

ship Branch of Alberta Community Development. The program has two application deadlines per year: May 1st and October 1st.

"Really, what we're looking for is change," says Program Consultant Susan Coombes. "For 20 years, we've been raising awareness, and for 20 more years, we can raise awareness. But, you know, we're not moving very fast just raising awareness. So we're looking for something that comes out of it."

The result, says Coombs, is that program

administrators are keen to support initiatives that include some kind of action strategy. She points to a recently funded program spearheaded by CNIB, which will attempt to change employer attitudes about visual impairment and blindness. "They're actually developing a program to work with employers to begin to help them address issues of visual impairment within their workforce," she says. (See page 4 for details on this program.)

She adds that organizations that take a non-confrontational, hands-on approach in fighting discrimination are given preference over those that attempt to simply dictate change.

For more information, or to obtain an application package, contact the Human Rights and Citizenship, Alberta Community Development, at 780/427-3116 (Edmonton) or 403/297-8407 (Calgary). Both numbers are available toll-free through the RITE operator (310-0000). Deaf and hard of hearing Albertans can call via TTY at 800/232-7215. ♦

Feds Offer Further Support for Home Adaptation



The federal government recently allocated an additional \$50 million in funding to the Canada-wide Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), administered through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

The funding is in addition to the \$250 million for supporting the program over the next five years that was announced last January.

CMHC is expecting provincial governments that cost-share in the program to match the new funding.

RRAP provides funding to help bring housing occupied by low-income individuals and families up to minimum health and safety standards. The program includes a special component that allows housing to be adapted for improved accessibility for people with disabilities.

The funding announcement was made in December by Alfonso Gagliano, Minister Responsible for CMHC. For more information on RRAP, contact your local CMHC office. ♦



RRAP can provide funding to improve basic accessibility in homes for people who use wheelchairs.



VoicePrint Launched In Alberta

National news reading service for the blind gains Alberta flavour with new Calgary bureau

It took almost eight years, but Canada's national news and information cable network for blind and visually impaired people has finally opened an Alberta bureau.

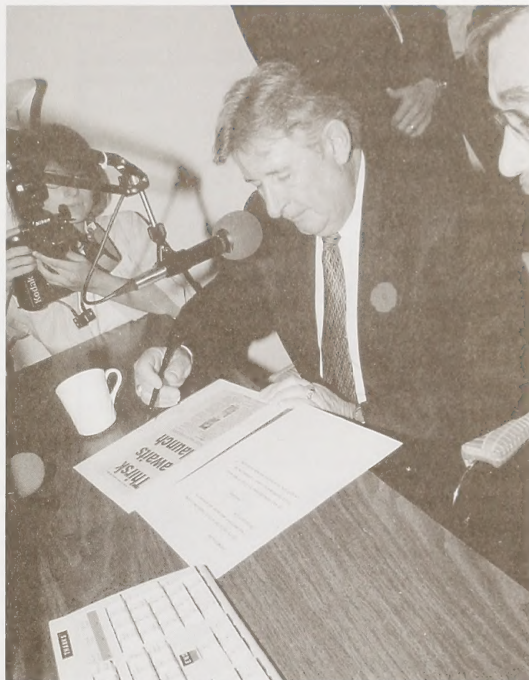
VoicePrint is audio-only television programming that is heard across the country on cable television networks. The programming is primarily made up of audio versions of newspaper stories, allowing people who can't see a newspaper to "read" it anyway. VoicePrint is operated by National Broadcast Reading Service (NBRS), a not-for-profit organization based in Toronto.

VoicePrint, which went on the air in 1990, is received free in more than 5.2 million Canadian households, thanks to the efforts of hundreds of volunteer news readers and scores of Canadian cable companies such as Shaw and Videotron. The service will soon be distributed by both Canadian satellite television services, Star Choice and ExpressVu.

While visually impaired Albertans have been able to hear VoicePrint for years (check your local cable company for channel location), they haven't been able to hear any local news—until now, that is. The launching of the Calgary bureau, which took place last September, means that Alberta finally has a presence in the national network.

The bureau is operated by two full-time employees. Lynne Rach, Bureau Chief, became Calgary's first female news anchor when she took over the desk at CFCN in 1974. "It's a wonderful spot at this age and stage of my life," says Rach. "It's a way of giving back, and using the skills and so on that I've developed since 1965."

Rach is joined by another seasoned journalist, Jim Knowler, former city editor of the Calgary Herald. Rach and Knowler lead a team of volunteer news readers, many of whom are broadcast professionals, such as



On the air: The official launch of VoicePrint, on October 26, featured a story read by Alberta's most famous former broadcaster. Premier Ralph Klein, who was a reporter at CFCN during the 1970s, took over the microphone for a few minutes after cutting the ribbon.

current CFCN news anchor Barb Higgins.

Every morning, two volunteers read stories from Calgary's two local daily newspapers. They assemble a 30 minute package of news, which is then sent to Toronto and added to other packages from across Canada.

Calgary's program then airs at 2 PM daily and is repeated at 10 PM and 5 AM the following day.

For Rach and Knowler, however, operating the new bureau is about more than simply supplying a 30 minute news package. It means building and managing a team of capable volunteers—they now have 65 news readers, and are still seeking volunteers to work in other aspects of the bureau's operations.

Raising awareness of the service is another priority. According to Rach, CNIB staff in Calgary weren't aware of the service until only recently. Another hurdle has been the cable companies—Rach says they tend to move VoicePrint indiscriminately. "We went on the air on the 21st of September," she says. "On October 9th, they changed our channel. What happens when blind people go (to listen to VoicePrint), is they think we're just gone. They don't realize that we've just gone someplace else."

Rach and Knowler have also kicked off a fundraising drive to raise up to \$200,000 per year—funding that is necessary to operate the bureau and supplement the national network's operating budget. Rach says they will raise money through corporate donations, and through a fee-based voice recording service.

What about Edmonton? "If we can raise the money for Calgary," says Rach, "that's our next step—an Edmonton bureau." ♦

Alberta Disabilities Forum Goes Public

The Alberta Disabilities Forum, consisting of nearly 30 organizations of and for Albertans with disabilities, officially introduced itself to the public at a press conference on November 26. The Forum was formed by these groups in an attempt to work together for improvements for all Albertans with disabilities.

On behalf of Premier's Council Chair Rob Loughheed, Executive Director Elaine Chapelle attended the press conference. She congratulated the members for their vision and commitment to work together. ♦



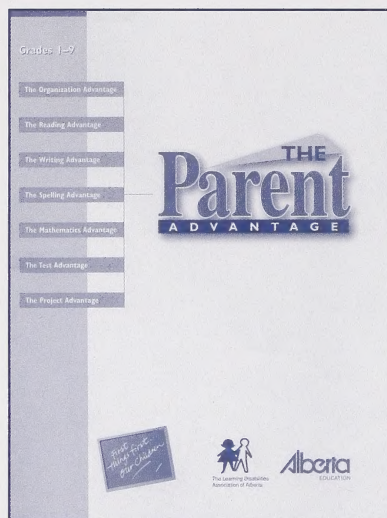
Educating Kids with Learning Disabilities: Taking Advantage of the Advantage

Although there are many unsolved mysteries in the study of learning disabilities, there is one area of consensus—supportive parents can make a positive difference in a child's school success. To capitalize on this advantage, the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta partnered with Alberta Education to publish a guide book for parents called *The Parent Advantage*. The guide focuses on how to help students be better learners at home and school in grades one to nine.

The guide was released in September of 1998. In less than four months, almost ten thousand copies have been distributed to parents and teachers across the province.

Students with learning disabilities make up at least ten percent of the school population. This invisible disability prevents students from learning to their potential and can limit academic achievement. Strategy-based instruction can give these students new tools for learning. The strategies training must begin in the early grades in school, and for optimum success, needs to be reinforced at home.

The Parent Advantage, written by two experienced teacher writers, is a collection



of easy-to-use learning strategies that have been successful with hundreds of students and their families. The book contains practical strategies for getting organized, reading, writing, spelling, mathematics, taking tests and doing projects.

What sets this book apart from other publications is the involvement and feedback

from parents in the development of the content. It was parent interest that initiated this project and parents and teachers across the province who field-tested the first draft. The authors used the reactions and ideas of these committed parents and professionals to make the final draft as responsive and practical as possible.

The book is garnering positive reviews throughout the province. To quote Dr. Anne Price of the Calgary Learning Centre: "The content is well chosen and the presentation is very appealing and user friendly... Many of the ideas are important complements to strategies many teachers introduce, and provide parents with the opportunity to help their children learn and apply strategies... a must have."

This book empowers parents. It gives them tools and ideas for helping their own children, whether or not they are experiencing learning difficulties. It is available through local chapters of the Learning Disabilities Association. The cost is \$4.45 plus GST. The book is also available through the Learning Resources Distribution Centre at 427-5775 in Edmonton (toll-free using the RITE operator—dial 310-0000 first). ♦

ACCD Offers Bursary to Students with Disabilities



Do you know of an outstanding student with a disability seeking financial assistance to continue his or her studies?

The Alberta Committee for Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) recently announced its 25th Anniversary Bursary Project. The bursary will be awarded each year to people with disabilities to further their level of expertise in the educational field of their choosing. The bursary will total \$2,000 per year, with individual awards varying from \$200 to \$500.

Applicants must be Alberta citizens, 18 years old or older, living with a disability. They must become a member of ACCD

and intend to use the bursary for attendance at an accredited institution in Alberta. The bursary may be used for course materials or tuition fees.

Applicants must submit a completed application form, a letter of reference from an adult other than a family member, and verifying documents from the educational institution. Successful applicants will be selected on the basis of their motivation, level of need and economic circumstances.

For more information, or to obtain an application form, contact ACCD at 488-9088 (Edmonton) or 800/387-2514 (toll-free). You can also e-mail ACCD (accd@oanet.com). ♦



Yve's Creations Are Stylish, Practical

Adaptive clothing store for people with disabilities opens in Edmonton

A few years ago, one of Yvette's friends asked her to modify several items of clothing for her mother, who had suffered a stroke and lived in an extended care facility. Yvette, a seamstress for over 20 years, was happy to help out—but she wondered why her friend wouldn't just go out and buy some clothing made to match her mother's needs.

"She said, 'It's not that easy—there isn't any place to buy,'" recalls Yvette. "All of sudden, it just dawned on me. I thought, 'Why isn't anybody doing this?' And it was actually last Boxing Day that I said, 'That's it. I'm doing it.'"

What Yvette did first was complete a flurry of research. She found out who makes adapted clothing for seniors and people with disabilities in Canada, where they make it, and how much it costs. Then she approached her bank with a solid business plan for a combination of factory and retail outlet. By last May, Yve's Creations was in business.

The southside Edmonton location houses 1,000 square feet of retail store and another 1,000 square feet of factory. There, Yvette and her two full-time employees—another seamstress and a designer—produce an evolving line of adaptive clothing for seniors and people who use wheelchairs. The clothing, says Yvette, is designed to increase freedom of movement, ease of dressing, independence, confidence and comfort.

Initially, much of her focus was producing clothes for seniors with disabilities. But she's experienced increasing interest from younger consumers, and is now designing several items for active wheelchair users.

Not even a year old, Yve's Creations is doing a brisk trade. "I'm not turning a profit yet—it takes a while to get out of the red," says Yvette. "But we're holding our own. We figured out that we've only tapped into two percent of the population who are in care facilities. That's not counting the all the other people out there who need this."

Yvette says the secret to her early success is combining style, quality and fair pricing.

"What we're trying to do is work with as best quality as we can get for fabric, yet keep the prices down. We work with different fabrics and different styles to try to make them look as normal as possible, as comfortable as possible, and easy to care for."

She adds that flexibility also plays a key role in her success. "Our customers can choose. They can come in, they can see what we have, then can say, 'Well, I really like that style, but it would work better for me in this fabric or this colour. If it's something we stock or can get from our supplier, we do special orders like that and charge them off-the-rack prices. My customers are my best researchers.'"

Yvette's plans for the future may include a catalogue for long-distance shoppers. But

she's approaching the prospect cautiously. "I think what I'd like to do is have a good year under my belt and have an actual line that I can say, 'This is my line' before I actually start developing a catalogue."

Meanwhile, if you'd like to see Yvette's creations first hand, and how she makes them, you can drop by her store and factory any day except Sunday. "Anybody can tour our factory at any time, because I love showing it off. I love showing off what we do—we're very proud of what we do." ♦

Yve's Creations Ltd.
#412, 8170 - 50th Street
Edmonton, Alberta T6B 1E6
Telephone: 780/450-8899
Toll-free: 888/450-7724



Yvette's customers can choose adaptive clothing right off the rack (top) or have an item custom-tailored in the on-site factory (bottom).



Ontario Proposes Disability Act

The Ontario government has proposed new legislation which it says will significantly improve the lot of citizens with disabilities. But not everyone is ecstatic about the legislation, entitled the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

In announcing the proposal in late November, Isabel Bassett, Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, described the Act as a milestone. "If approved by the legislature, (the Act) will require every ministry to identify, remove and prevent barriers by systematically reviewing its legislation, policies, programs, practices and services."

The proposed Act would require that ministries prepare an annual Disability Access Plan as part of the business-planning process. Plans would contain a list of all activities that would be reviewed in that year, measures to ensure new activities are assessed for their effect on access for persons with disabilities, and steps taken to remove and prevent barriers.

While Bassett and the Ontario government cabinet announced the proposal with great fanfare, it has received a lukewarm—and even hostile—reception from a number of people with disabilities and organizations that represent them.

One of those is the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA). Eric Boyd, CPA's National Managing Director, describes the Act as "a joke". He views it as nothing more

than legislation that suggests a commitment by the Ontario government to review its own internal policies, and says it does nothing to address the barriers that exist in the larger world outside of government.

Boyd adds that the name of the proposed Act is outrageous, given its similarity to the powerful and sweeping Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that exists in the United States. "Because of this correlation between ODA and ADA," says Boyd, "there was an honest expectation that the Ontario government was going to come through with concrete legislative remedies to remove barriers to community participation, to education, to employment. What people got was a lot of rhetoric about what the government was already doing."

Announcement of the proposed Act was followed in two weeks time by the news that Ontario government was successful in repealing its own Employment Equity Act. This Act, introduced in 1993, forced the Ontario government to fill quotas with members of minority groups within its own public service ranks. Mike Harris's government attempted to repeal the Act in 1995, but this process was held up by legal action brought by a group known as the Alliance for Employment Equity. On December 8, however, the Ontario Court of Appeal unanimously confirmed the government's right to repeal job quota laws. ♦

Latimer Case Headed For Supreme Court?

Robert Latimer, the Saskatchewan farmer convicted of murdering his 12-year old disabled daughter Tracy, suffered a huge legal setback in late November when the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal imposed a sentence of life in prison with no chance of parole for ten years.

A panel of three judges agreed that Justice Ted Noble erred when, in November of 1997, he granted Latimer a constitutional exemption from the mandatory sentence for second degree murder and instead imposed a two year sentence.

The judges ruled that they were bound to follow a previous judgement of the appeal court after Latimer's first trial which denied a constitutional exemption.

Latimer's wife, Laura, told reporters she was stunned by the news, but also said her husband would now appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Latimer killed his daughter by putting her in his truck and piping in deadly exhaust fumes. He has steadfastly maintained that he killed her out of love in a bid to end her suffering. Tracy's intellect and ability to communicate were extremely limited, due to a severe form of cerebral palsy. ♦

Travelling to England?



A new tour company in Britain advertises that it offers travel arrangements exclusively for people with disabilities. Wright Way Ltd. says it specializes in accommodation, transportation, activity holidays, guided tours and more for disabled travellers. The company will secure travel arrangements and ensure that all pre-booked facilities are suitably accessible.

"I have been in the travel industry for over 16 years and I have a great understanding of the problems experienced by the disabled traveller when arriving in a foreign country," says Andy Wright, Managing Director. "Three years ago I was diagnosed as

suffering from syringomyelia, a rare spinal condition, and now with restricted mobility myself, I am well aware of the difficulties facing the less able.

"Should you, or someone you know, want to travel to the UK but are unsure about the suitability of either the accommodation or transportation, please contact me and I will be happy to make all your necessary travel arrangements."

You can reach Wright Way Ltd. by telephone (011) 44 1242 677787, by fax at (011) 44 1242 676470, by e-mail (sales@wrightway.co.uk), or via Internet (<http://www.wrightway.co.uk>). ♦



Guide Eases Confusion of Air Travel

Despite many recent improvements, travelling by airplane remains an uncertain prospect for many Canadians with disabilities. The Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) has taken a step towards eliminating that uncertainty by publishing a new guide for people with disabilities entitled *Taking Charge of the Air Travel Experience*.

This booklet outlines the steps that are critical to ensure a problem-free travelling experience for people who use wheelchairs and people with hearing or visual disabilities. It answers many common questions related to washroom accessibility, required documentation, attendant fares, and seat selection. It also offers pointers on which types of aircraft are more suitable for wheelchair users.

Above all, the guide stresses the importance of clearly communicating a traveller's specific needs to service providers—and of double checking all travel arrangements for suitability.

Taking Charge of the Air Travel Experience is available in both official languages as a booklet, audio cassette, computer disk or in Braille. To obtain a complimentary copy, contact the CTA at 800/883-1813. You can also find the guide on the Internet (www.cta-otc.gc.ca).



Other recent CTA work involves inter-city bus travel, one of the most economical and convenient ways to travel in Canada. Poor accessibility has kept many Canadians with disabilities from using inter-city buses, but Transport Canada set out to resolve this problem in 1996 by forming a

committee of industry and consumer representatives to develop accessibility standards. This past July, the committee released a code of practice for bus operators. The code officially came into effect on October 1 on a two-year trial basis.

The code of practice isn't a hard and fast set of regulations. Transport Canada describes it as a "voluntary statement of commitment based on consensus between industry and consumers—a commitment to easier access for all citizens to inter-city bus travel."

The code outlines steps that should be taken by bus companies to make their vehicles and services more accessible. It addresses areas such as signage, lighting, stairs and armrests, and it offers guidance to determine which services should be delivered automatically and which services should be offered on a special request, advance notice basis.

The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) interprets the code of practice in this way: "The code is important to people with disabilities because it requires that people using wheelchairs be boarded by means of a lift or ramp with no manual boarding, provides for the free transportation of attendants and service animals, provides for accessible communications for persons with sensory disabilities, and requires the carrier to transport mobility aids and to replace and/or repair damaged or lost mobility aids."

To ensure the code of practice is effective, it includes a complaints process. Travellers who believe they have experienced a disability-related barrier to inter-city bus travel can lodge a complaint with Transport Canada. While it's likely that most complaints will be resolved at the local level, Transport Canada is prepared to provide independent mediation services in cases where intervention is necessary.

Note that the code's "voluntary" basis clearly leaves some doubt as to whether or not Transport Canada will have the power to enforce any rulings made in favour of complainants. ♦

GST Rebate On Adapted Vehicles?



This past August, Federal Finance Minister Paul Martin released draft legislation for a proposed GST rebate for motor vehicles specially adapted for use by people who use wheelchairs. The proposed rebate would be applied against "the GST/HST paid on the portion of the vehicle that is reasonably attributable to the special features" (*GST/HST News*, Winter 1998).

The proposed rebate would cover GST paid to adapt new or used vehicles to transport wheelchair users, and to equip new or used vehicles with auxiliary controls (hand controls). Under the proposed legislation, the vehicle reseller could pay or credit the amount of the rebate directly to the purchaser and claim an equivalent deduction in determining the net tax.

In addition to outright purchases, the proposed rebate would apply to leases. For more information, contact your local tax services office. ♦

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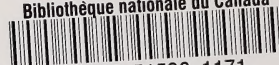
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**Travel**

Travel Insurance for People with Disabilities

TravelAbility is comprehensive travel insurance for Canadians with physical disabilities, their wheelchairs and travel companions.

Most travellers aren't aware that, when out of the province they live in, many medical charges for ambulance, prescriptions and lab tests aren't covered by their provincial healthcare plans. TravelAbility can cover these risks.

Offered by the Aurora York Travel Insurance Agencies Inc., this new travel insurance was developed with input from the Ontario March of Dimes. Here's a summary of the benefits:

- Basic coverage includes up to \$2 million in hospitalization and medical benefits to supplement provincial healthcare plans, as well as a minimum of accidental death and disablement coverage.

- For people between 15 days and 70 years of age, on trips less than 36 days, the exclusion on pre-existing conditions does not apply in most cases.

- Optional plans include baggage, air flight accident, trip interruption, and wheelchair coverage (which allows you to be reimbursed up to \$2,000 for the repair or replacement of your wheelchair or other mobility aid.)

Rates for single trip plans range from \$1.10 to \$2.75 per day per person, depending on age and destination (rates increase with age, and are also slightly higher for USA destinations). There are also family rates, as well as multi-trip plans. The optional plan for wheelchair coverage is \$2 per day.

For more information, call TravelAbility's enrollment centre at 888/573-7251. ♦

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AURORA YORK TRAVEL INSURANCE AGENCIES INC.

Physical Disability Insurance

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Coming Events

The Wild Rose Foundation presents Vitalize '99 Provincial Volunteer Conference, June 10 - 12, 1999, at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton. Themes: recognizing our efforts, accessing resources, understanding community needs, working together, and volunteering for life. For more information, contact Patrick Leonard or Rosanna Dame, Wildrose Foundation, at 422-9305 (toll-free through RITE Operator—dial 310-0000).

The International Association for Cognitive Education (IACE) presents its 7th International Conference, June 27 - 30, 1999, at the University of Calgary. Theme: "Putting the Cognitive into Education." For more information, contact organizers at 403/

686-9300 or visit the conference website (www.cadvision.com/pcgenie/iace.html).

The Canadian Paraplegic Association (Alberta) and the Brain Injury Association of Alberta present Neurotrauma Connections '99: An Alberta Symposium and Assistive Technology Trade Show, September 28 - 29, 1999, at the Mayfield Inn and Convention Centre in Edmonton. Theme: working together in neurotrauma research, rehabilitation and prevention. For more information, contact the Canadian Paraplegic Association at 424-6312 (Edmonton) or 888/654-5444 (toll-free), or visit the Symposium website (www.connections-99.com). ♦

